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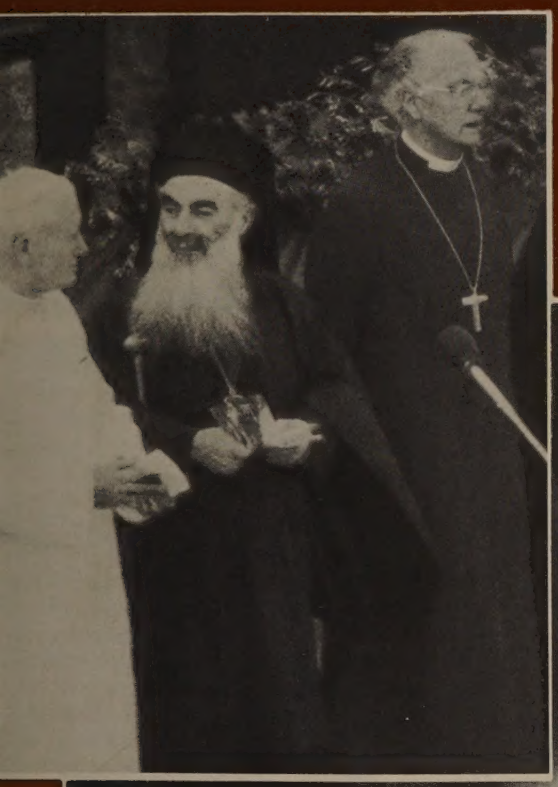

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A NEW YEAR OF HOPE

livingCity
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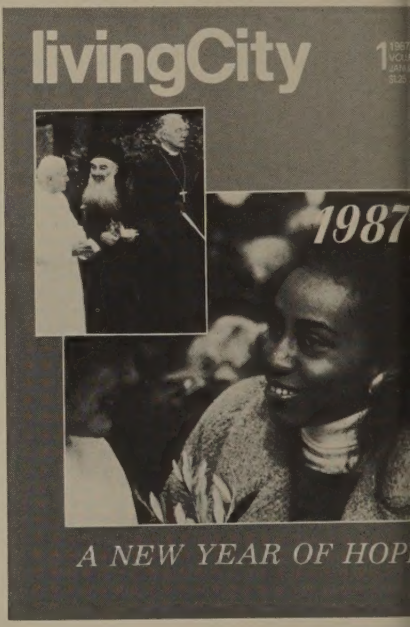

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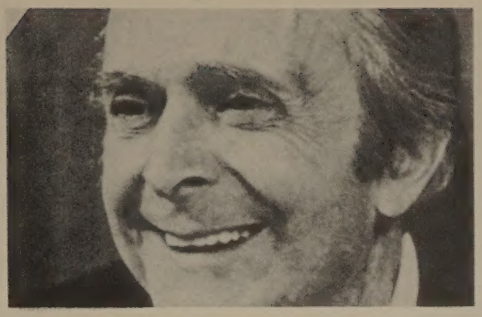
AFTERMATH OF AN EMERGENCY: A group of youth of the Focolare assist in the task of rebuilding hope with the survivors of the Lake Nyos disaster.



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"A little bit more"

Question: This may be a personal question: you are the founder of a movement in the Church; what is most important to you? Furthermore, which advice can you give us to help us live our Christian commitment well each day?

A couple from Rocca di Papa, Italy

Answer: I can tell you what I try to do. I strive to improve each day. By that I mean that as much as possible I try not to let today be the same as yesterday, i.e., I try to make each day an improvement over the day before. You know the saying: "Those who do not go forward, go backward."

When I wake up each morning and have meditation I make my resolution for the day: "Today has to be better than yesterday." This is very important for me. I think that since we wish to reach sanctity—and we must—we cannot be satisfied with how we lived the day before. Each day has to be a little better. For this reason we should pray a little bit better than the day before, work a little bit better, make ourselves a little more one with our neighbor, we should live mutual love a little bit more, and love Jesus Forsaken a little more. A little bit more today than yesterday.

Very important to me, then, is of course that we have unity within the movement that God has entrusted to me because "From this shall all know that you are my disciples...." For this reason, to see unity grow we all strive to perfect ourselves always more, to keep Jesus always in our midst. But by individually living that "a little bit more," every day unity will also progress among all.

Another thing is that I wish that we never stop to look at ourselves but rather that we strive always to reach out to others, that we never forget the dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters of other Churches, with believers of other religions, with non believers....

Three things therefore: to improve " a little bit" every day, to always maintain a great unity with one another, to strive to reach out to others.

CHIARA LUBICH

THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

A new phase in interreligious dialogue was opened when the representatives of the religions of the world gathered to pray for peace in Assisi in response to the initiative of Pope John Paul II.

Compiled by PHYLLIS SCARINGE

October 27 was a day which will pass into history as a "first" for humanity. Leaders of the major religions representing all faiths and forms of religion on the face of the earth gathered to pray for peace. This extraordinary gathering and the universally felt need which brought it about—war and violence in our times—made the event unique in its solidarity in prayer. By every

religion, peace is recognized as a gift of God even though it of course must be earned through human efforts and cannot be separated from justice, fraternity and solidarity. For years now religions have felt the need to unite—on the local level or over geographical areas—to promote peace. This event clearly manifested a global commitment to seek peace. The day also drew the attention of political leaders. In fact, sixty heads of government sent messages expressing their support. Israel, El Salvador, The Tamil United Liberation Front, Sudan, Yassar Arafat and the five major terrorist groups of Sri Lanka all gave orders to refrain from all forms of fighting for the day in response to the Pope's request for a truce to be observed. The event seemed to effect a kind of moral obligation to re-think the reasons for peace even on the battlefield. The atmosphere of Assisi, the city of Francis, will from now on remind its visitors of yet another powerful spiritual milestone.

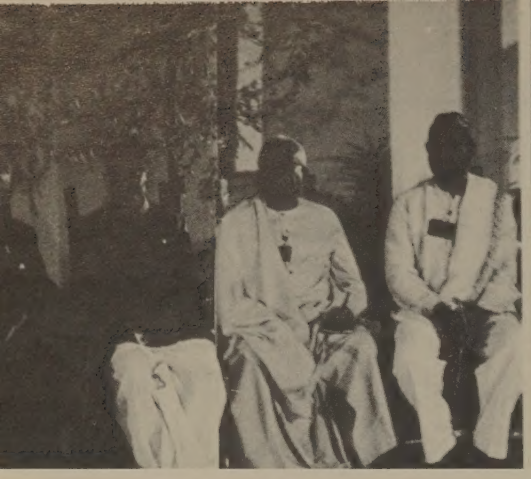
This personal initiative of John Paul II—of which he had no second thoughts from the very beginning—was rich in symbol and meaning. There were those who foresaw in the event a possible source of theological misunderstanding yet the Pope would not be discouraged: "It is a risk we must take ...," was his reply. Many precautions were taken so that the gathering of so many religions would not be, nor appear in any way to be, a concession to syncretism. "We have come from many religious traditions around the world," Cardinal Roger Etchegaray president of the Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace responsible for preparing the gathering, stated. "We come together in complete faithfulness to our own religious traditions, well aware of the identity of each of our own faith commitments.... This is what makes the richness and the value of this prayer encounter."

It was a first hand opportunity to witness the readiness of the more than sixty representatives of twelve world religions to participate in this unprecedented encounter and give witness to the fact that dialogue among religions is possible. Even more, dialogue is not only possible but desirable. No one should be surprised that such an event should take place. In fact, such possibilities had already been prepared by Vatican II. Among the great signs of the times Vatican II had particularly cited the acceleration towards the unification of humanity as a sign that corresponds to the plan of God; that all people "form one family and treat each other as brothers," that nothing be lost of "the good sown in the hearts

and minds of people or in the rites and cultures of peoples" rather all that is good should be brought to perfection. As the Holy Father said at the Christian prayer service in the Cathedral of Saint Rufino: "Prayer for peace ... must make us grow in respect for one another as human beings, as Churches and Ecclesial Communities, ready to live together in the world with people of other religions, with all people of good will."

On October 27, Assisi was not a place for socio-political discussion, but for prayer and reflection of faith, for making a statement that peace for humanity will come through peace with God. Associating themselves with the appeal of the United Nations in this year declared the International Year of Peace the faithful of the different religions in this way emphasized the religious value of this initiative on a worldwide level.

(to the right) Two Crow Indians from Montana offered the peace pipe "to you brothers and sisters in all the world." The traditional African religions were also represented.



In the square of St. Francis, voices representing the peoples of the world were raised in prayer for peace. It was a historic experience uniting persons of the most varied cultures and civilizations. (above: Hindus, Zoroastrians, Buddhists).

In a certain sense we were all present in Assisi that day through the prayers and gestures that reaffirmed the ancient fundamental pact of humanity with the Absolute and with one another. Through them the way to, and the substance of, peace was expressed with an eloquence that hearkened back five or more thousands of years and yet spoke for today. Not only words but also symbols and gestures expressed the hopes of this day. Olive plants were offered to each of the religious leaders, olive branches were raised overhead by the crowd, and flocks of doves were set free.

Our scientific culture tends to underrate these events and gestures asserting that they accomplish little. However we are well aware of the dangers that threaten our world and how inadequate our efforts at achieving peace have proven to be. For this reason the gathering of religions at Assisi repeated to us that the answers must indeed be sought elsewhere. As the Holy Father said in his opening address: "The coming together of so many religious leaders to pray is in itself an invitation today to the world to become aware that there exists another dimension of peace and another way of promoting it which is not a result of negotiations, political compromises or economic bargainings. It is the result of prayer, which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone." □

Preparations for a historic day

The invitation for the Assisi event came from John Paul II on January 25, 1986 at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. From the Basilica of Saint Paul he publicly announced the desire to "contribute in bringing about a worldwide movement of prayer for peace that would go beyond national boundaries, involve believers of all religions and reach and embrace the entire world."

1986, the International Year of Peace as proclaimed by the United Nations, offered the occasion for the initiative. However, the event had no political overtones: its sole motive was to pray. Furthermore, Assisi was chosen and not Rome so as to avoid someone thinking that it might ultimately turn out to be a big papal audience.

Even though he was host, the Holy Father walked with the other religious leaders as a pilgrim among pilgrims through the streets of Assisi which represents a place of universal brotherhood and is the patrimony of all men of good will. In fact during the consultations carried on for such a gathering the city of Francis was unanimously accepted by all the religious representatives. A special commission of the Holy See set up through the Bishops' Conferences worldwide, coordinated the contacts and consultations with religious leaders on every continent.

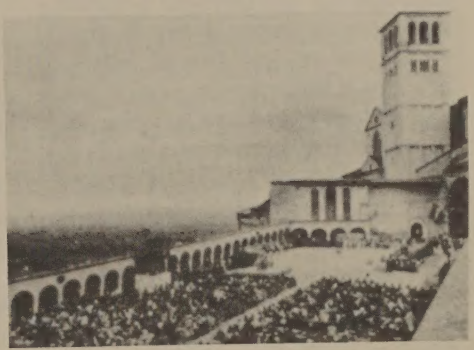
For months Assisi underwent mobilization to prepare the best possible hospitality in the stupendous places that make the city a masterpiece of art besides being a testimony of deep spirituality. On the part of everyone, attention was given to providing maximum respect to each group's prayer according to its own particular customs and beliefs without falling into sincretism and religious relativism. Care was taken to avoid choosing a day which would be a holy day for any one of the

The friendship between Francis and the Sultan in Egypt during the Crusades expressed the universality of reconciliation that was at the basis of the saint's message. Assisi was unanimously accepted by all the religious representatives as the site for the event. (Photo: "The trial by fire before the Sultan" by the School of Giotto). Below: the lower square of St. Francis during the concluding program.

groups. The various leaders expressed the wish that the day be characterized by those forms which are shared by the major religions of the world such as vocal prayer, listening to sacred texts, silence, fasting, pilgrimage and solidarity in good works. The city of Assisi was closed off to all traffic for the day.

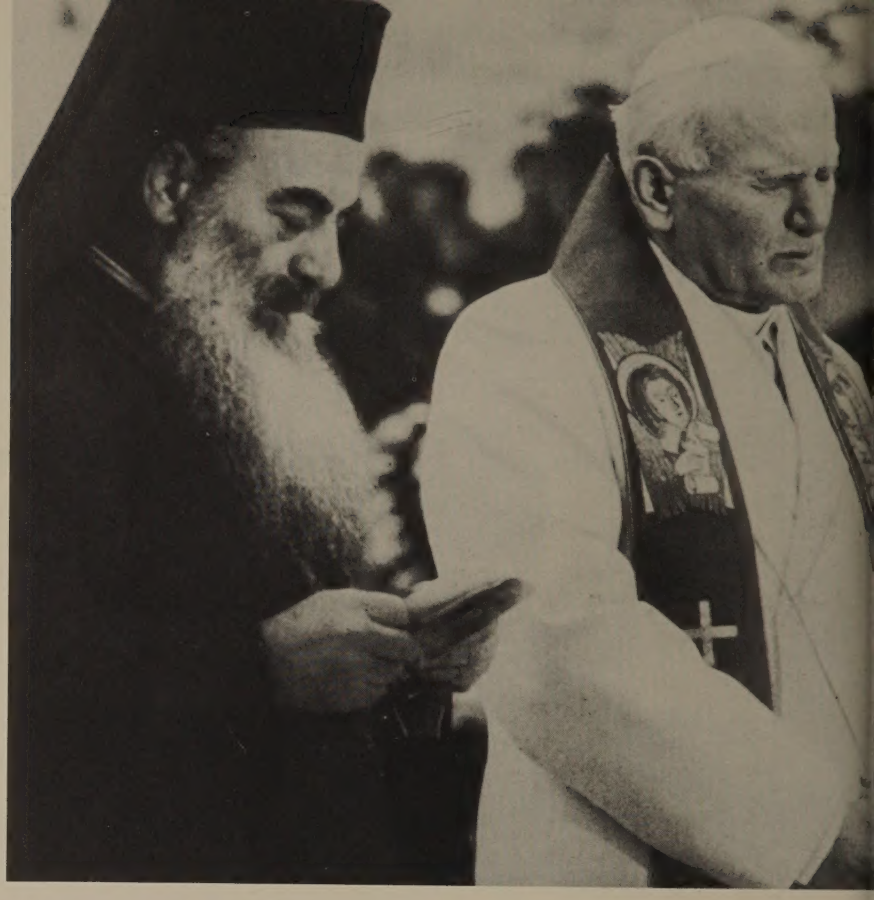
The basic programmatic outline was as follows: all gathered in the morning at the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels where the Holy Father welcomed the leaders. It was a moment of joy for all. After that the different groups met for prayer and recollection according to their own traditions. Nine different locations were provided. The Christians of the various Churches prayed together in the Cathedral of San Rufino for peace and also ex pressed the desire for the full communion of Christians. The Catholic representation was purposely limited in order to preserve the ecumenical character of the meeting. Buddhists of the Tibetan, Mahayana and Therevada traditions met in the Church of Saint Peter. The Dalai Lama himself was present.

The Jews met in a square adjacent to the Church of Saint Francis, the Hindus in Saint Mary Major and the Moslems in the hall of the Minerva. The traditional African religions, the Sikhs, the Bahai, the Zoroastrians, the Jains, the American Crow Indians and others all had special locations in which to pray. On account of the fasting, there was no lunch. The groups proceeded to walk from the places of prayer to the square of the Basilica of Saint Francis for the central moment of the day where all gathered together to offer each one's own intercession and affirm a renewed commitment to peace. At the end of the day a dinner offered by the Franciscans provided an opportunity for joyful sharing.



Each religious leader represented thousands or even millions of persons throughout the world. The following religions are listed with their actual worldwide membership:

Buddhism: 300 million
Islam: 700 million
Shintoism: 80 million
Traditional African Religions: 200 million
Judaism: 17 million
Christianity: 1 billion 385 million: among whom 825 million are Catholic
Sikhism: 22 million
Jainism: 2,600,000
Zoroastrianism: 250,000



The event concluded when the religious leaders prayed for peace in the square of St. Francis. Pope John Paul II gave the following address.

My Brothers and Sisters,
Heads and Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,
Dear Friends,

In concluding this World Day of Prayer for Peace, to which you have come from many parts of the world, kindly accepting my invitation, I would like now to express my feelings, as a brother and friend, but also as a believer in Jesus Christ, and, in the Catholic Church, the first witness of faith in him.

In relation to the last prayer, the Christian one, in the series we have all heard, I profess here anew my conviction, shared by all Christians, that in Jesus Christ, as Savior of all, true peace is to be found, "peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near" (cf. Eph 2:17). His birth was greeted by the angels' songs: "Glory to God in the highest and peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2:14). He preached love among all, even among foes, proclaimed blessed those who work for peace (cf. Mt 5:9) and through his Death and Resurrection he brought about reconciliation between heaven and earth (cf. Col 1:20). To use an expression of Paul the Apostle: "He is our peace" (Eph 2:14).

Many shared convictions

It is, in fact, my faith conviction which has made me turn to Churches and Ecclesial Communities and World Religions, in deep love and respect.

With the other Christians we share many convictions and, particularly, in what concerns peace.

With the World Religions we share a common respect of and obedience to conscience, which teaches all of us to seek the truth, to love and serve all individuals and peoples, and therefore to make peace among individuals and among nations.

Yes, we all hold conscience and obedience to the voice of conscience to be an essential element in the road towards a better and peaceful world.

Could it be otherwise, since all men and women in this world have a common nature, a common origin and a common destiny?

If there are many and important differences among us, there is also a common ground, whence to operate together in the solution of this dramatic challenge of our age: true peace or catastrophic war.

Yes, there is the dimension of prayer, which in the very real diversity of religions tries to express communication with a Power above all our human forces.

Peace depends basically on this Power, which we call God, and as Christians believe has revealed himself in Christ.

This is the meaning of this World Day of Prayer.

For the first time in history, we have come together from everywhere, Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and World Religions, in this sacred place dedicated to Saint Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace.

The form and content of our prayers are very different, as we have seen, and there can be no question of reducing them to a kind of common denominator.

Yet, in this very difference we have perhaps discovered anew that, regarding the problem of peace and its relation to religious commitment, there is something which binds us together.

Pope John Paul II with Archbishop Methodius, delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios I, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, primate of the Anglican Communion, shown together during the Christian prayer service. There has never been an event that united so many representatives of the various Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities as there was that day.

The challenge of peace, as it is presently posed to every human conscience, is the problem of a reasonable quality of life for all, the problem of survival for humanity, the problem of life and death.

In the face of such a problem, two things seem to have supreme importance and both of them are common to us all.

The first is the inner imperative of the moral conscience, which enjoins us to respect, protect and promote human life, from the womb to the deathbed, for individuals and peoples, but especially for the weak, the destitute, the derelict: the imperative to overcome selfishness, greed and the spirit of vengeance.

The second common thing is the conviction that peace goes much beyond human efforts, particularly in the present plight of the world, and therefore that its source and realization is to be sought in that Reality beyond all of us.

Open our hearts to the divine reality beyond us

This is why each of us prays for peace. Even if we think, as we do, that the relation between that Reality and the gift of peace is a different one, according to our respective religious convictions, we all affirm that such a relation exists.

This is what we express by praying for it.

I humbly repeat here my own conviction: peace bears the name of Jesus Christ.

But, at the same time and in the same breath, I am ready to acknowledge that Catholics have not always been faithful to this affirmation of faith. We have not been always "peacemakers".

For ourselves, therefore, but also perhaps, in a sense, for all, this encounter at Assisi is an act of *penance.* We have prayed, each in his own way, we have fasted, we have marched together.

In this way we have tried to open our hearts to the divine reality beyond us and to our fellow men and women.

Yes, while we have *fasted,* we have kept in mind the sufferings which senseless wars have brought about and are still bringing about on humanity. Thereby we have tried to be spiritually close to the millions who are the victims of hunger throughout the world.

While we *have walked in silence,* we have reflected on the path our human family treads: either in hostility, if we fail to accept one another in love; or as a common journey to our lofty destiny, if we realize that other people are our brothers and sisters. The very fact that we have come to Assisi from various quarters of the world is in itself a sign of this common path which humanity is called to tread. Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others. We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us.

This day at Assisi has helped us become more aware of our religious commitments. But it has also made the world, looking at us through the media, more aware of the responsibility of each religion regarding problems of war and peace.

More perhaps than ever before in history, the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all.

What a tremendous weight for human shoulders to carry! But at the same time what a marvellous, exhilarating call to follow.

Although prayer is in itself action, this does not excuse us from working for peace. Here we are acting as the heralds of the moral awareness of humanity as such, humanity that wants peace, needs peace. ►

There is no peace without a passionate love for peace. There is no peace without a relentless determination to achieve peace.

Peace awaits its prophets. Together we have filled our eyes with visions of peace: they release energies for a new language of peace, for a new gestures of peace, gestures which will shatter the fatal chains of divisions inherited from history or spawned by modern ideologies.

Peace awaits its builders. Let us stretch our hands towards our brothers and sisters, to encourage them to build peace upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom (cf. Pacem in Terris).

Peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists. Peace is a universal responsibility: it comes about through a thousand little acts in daily life. By their daily way of living with others, people choose for or against peace. We entrust the cause of peace especially to the young. May young people help to free history from the wrong paths along which humanity strays.

Peace is in the hands not only of individuals but of nations. It is the nations that have the honor of basing their peacemaking activity upon the conviction of the sacredness of human dignity and the recognition of the unquestionable equality of people with one another. We earnestly invite the leaders of the nations and of the international organizations to be untiring in bringing in structures of dialogue wherever peace is under threat or already compromised. We offer our support to their often exhausting efforts to

(Continued on page 28)

The head rabbi of Rome, Elio Toaff, is seen here with Cardinal R. Etchegaray, president of the commission which prepared the day. This was the first major inter-religious event in which Jews officially participated. The crowd spontaneously broke out into applause when, at the moment of welcoming in the morning, Rabbi Toaff and the Pope exchanged a fraternal embrace.

After having prayed according to their own tradition in separate locations all the leaders and representatives of the various religions gathered in the square of the Basilica of St. Francis for the concluding program. Each one came forward to offer his or her intercession for peace. We are printing the intercession offered by the representative of Judaism, Elio Toaff, head Rabbi of Rome.

O Lord, God in heaven, Lord of peace, have compassion and mercy on us and on all the peoples of the earth who seek peace. Lord, God in heaven, give us strength to act, to work, and to live as long as the spirit from above is manifested to us, so that the desert will become a vineyard, and the vineyard will become like a forest; so that justice will find its home in the desert; and love will dwell in the vineyard. The work of justice will bring about peace; the work of justice will bring serenity and safety forever.

"My people will dwell in a peaceful place, in dwelling places that are safe and in resting places, undisturbed." And so, Lord, our God, God of our fathers, bring to completion for us and for all people, the promise you made to us through your prophet Micah:

"In days to come the mount of the Lord's house
Shall be established higher than the mountains; it shall rise high above the hills,
And peoples shall stream to it:
Many nations shall come, and say,
"Come, let us climb the mount of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,
That he may instruct us in his ways, that we may walk in his paths."
For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between many peoples and impose terms on strong and distant nations;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;

THE DELEGATIONS REPRESENTED AT ASSISI WERE:

Tibetan Buddhism (the Dalai Lama from India),
Theravada Buddhism (Thailand),
Buddhism (Korea),
Japan Religious Committee for the World Federation,
Tendai Sect of Japanese Buddhism,
Shingon Buddhism,
Jodoshin Buddhism,
Eiheji-ji Buddhism,
Rissho Kosei-kai;
Hinduism (from India and Great Britain);
Jainism;
Zoroastrianism;
Sikhism;
Islam (Morocco),
Islam (from the WCRP in Pakistan, Turkey, Italy, India, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Mozambique);
Traditional African Religions with representatives from Kenya, Ghana, and Togo;
American Indians;

DELEGATION OF JUDAISM:
the Jewish Community of Rome, the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'Rith;

CHRISTIAN DELEGATIONS:
The Orthodox Churches:
the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople by Archbishop Methodius, Archbishop of Great Britain;
the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch;
the Orthodox Church of Russia; of Georgia (USSR); of Rumania; of Bulgaria; of Czechoslovakia; of Finland.

The Ancient Oriental Churches:
the Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch and all the Orient,
the Armenian Church of Etchmiadzine,
the Armenian Church of Cilicia,
the Syrian Church of India,
the Assyrian Church of the Orient.

Among the Christian Communions and World Christian organizations:
the Anglican Communion by Dr. Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates of Tanzania, Japan, Nigeria, the Middle East;
the Lutheran World Federation;
the World Alliance of Reformed Churches;
the Methodist World Council;
the Disciples of Christ;
the World Baptist Alliance;
the Union of Utrecht;
the World Council of Churches;
the Reformed Ecumenical Synod;
the Mennonite World Conference;
the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers);
World Young Women's Christian Association; World Young Men's Christian Association;
the International Association for Religious Freedom (Unitarian Church);
Catholic Bishops representing various National Bishops' Conferences;
the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch;
Representatives of the Franciscan Order.

OTHER REPRESENTATIVES:
The World Conference of Religions for Peace by Dr. John B. Taylor;
Representatives of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. Every man shall sit under his own vine or under his own fig tree, undisturbed; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken."

(Mi 4:1-4)

O, Lord God in heaven, give peace and wellbeing to our world; grant serenity to our dwelling places. Let us all say: "Amen". □

The Islamic prayer was chosen from the Koran. The opening chapter was recited in Arabic by all the Moslems present.

Aftermath of an Emergency

compiled by ORESTE PALIOTTI

Every disaster seems to provoke an immediate response of international solidarity. Usually, however, we hear very little about the overall outcome of the survivors and of those who assist them in their struggle to regain hope and courage. This is the case of a group of young people determined to share the drama of the survivors of the recent disaster in the Cameroon.

Nyos ... a name that circled the globe in a flash following the disaster that befell it last August. During the night, the volcanic lake, located in a highly fertile region of the country, began to spew forth toxic fumes which drifted to the three villages nearby. In all, some 1,700 persons are believed dead. In Nyos, the hardest-hit village, only three remain of the 600 persons who slept there that night. There were local townspeople and outsiders as well who had come to shop at the weekly market.

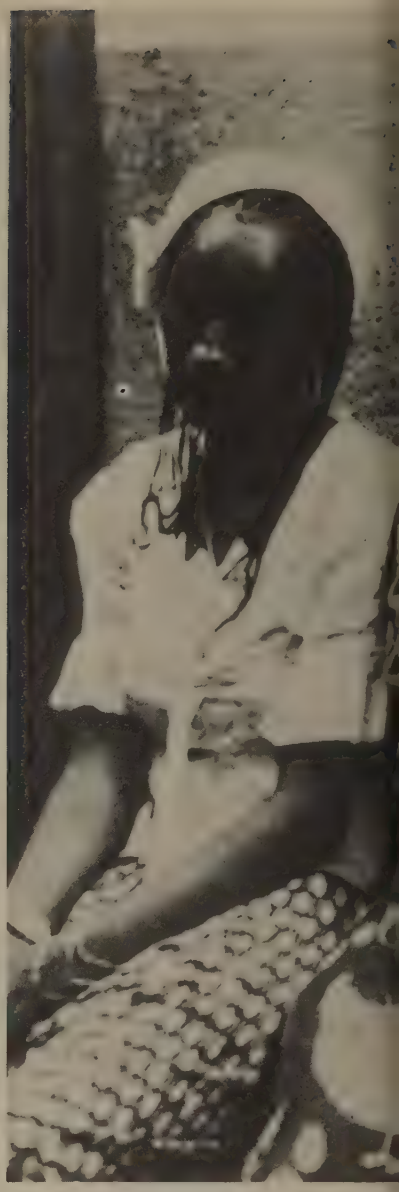
Certainly, larger, disasters have occurred throughout the world, with many more victims and greater material damage, but this one somehow was different, above all because of its unforeseeable and mysterious nature. This helps to explain

(photo above) Nyos, in the northwestern region of the Cameroon. The tractor tracks mark one of the improvised burial places of this village which was the hardest hit in the area. In all, close to 1700 people died.
(to the right) The experience of deep sadness marks the face of this young girl: she is the only survivor of her family. On her face, burn marks from the gas can still be seen.
(lower left) Charles, the first Gen to set foot in Nyos, is shown here with a group of surviving children. The boy, second from left in the front row, lost everyone in his family as did many other children.

the speed and measure with which help arrived from all over the world.

Surprise and commotion, however, do not last too long. Soon the attention of the world is caught up by some other major event occurring elsewhere on our tormented planet. It's enough to think of the disasters which occurred not long ago in Mexico and Colombia. Something similar was now happening to the survivors of Nyos—people who, in most cases, are the only ones left alive in often numerous families. The "emergency" has passed. It is the moment of the "aftermath," and the plight of the living, of those who lost everything and now must begin all over again in a new environment, is not newsworthy material. And neither is the generous and silent work of those who, having made themselves neighbors to the unfortunate survivors, now share their plight throughout the long recovery process.

Material help is usually not missing. In fact, it is often ►



plentiful. The lengthy and more painstaking task is that of restoring to those suffering from the impact of these disasters the courage to live, the strength to hope once again.

This, in fact, was the reason why a group of about twenty young people of the Gen Movement[1] travelled from Bamenda, a small town about an hour and a half from Nyos, to assist the survivors both in Wum, headquarters of the Catholic mission in that area, and in other camps. In this way they were part of the precious work of aid being carried out by the Cathoic Church in the Cameroon.

Charles had been sent by one of the daily newspapers of Bamenda as a photographer. He was the first of that group of Gen to set foot in the Nyos region, just one week after death had swept through that area which is so famous for its incredible natural beauty. This is what Charles reported:

"As I approached the area I was overcome by shock seeing all the homes, the cafe and the stores empty. There were no signs of life anywhere. We forced our way into the houses and found only the dead. I saw the corpses being buried ten and twenty at a time with a bulldozer. Then and there I understood how true it is that all is vanity of vanities; yet, within me, the certainty grew: God does not pass away, the Gospel remains. I was pleased to think that the only thing I had brought with me was the Gospel.

"Returning to Bamenda, I was so shaken by what had occurred that I couldn't even explain to my friends what I had seen. All of them would have liked to drop everything and go immediately to care for the survivors. First of all, however, it was important to visit the mission in Wum. This time, Sophie and Cletus, two gen, came with me. There, in the camp, we found about 150 people who were completely desperate, with no will to live. They repeated to us over and over, 'Do you understand? All my people are dead!' "

Faced with this desolation, the three Gen set about making themselves "family" to the survivors with many small but concrete acts of love, such as taking off a jacket and offering it to someone in need, or carrying water, or helping in the kitchen, or chopping wood or sweeping. It was work that they were not accustomed to, since usually, in their in their society, it is a woman's work. This could not but provoke a response from those being assisted and, in some cases, gave them the desire to help others. This had the effect of further helping them to come out of their desperation.

"As soon as I heard about what happened," Sophie recounted, "I would have liked to go there immediately. My family, however, was against it because they thought it might still be dangerous to approach the area, and they certainly weren't going to pay my trip!

"When they saw, however, that I was ready to take money even from my little savings in order to get there, they let me go. We worked very hard in Wum, and we experienced over and over again how much more beautiful it is to give than to receive.

"When I got home I told my family and relatives what I had seen and lived through and

A gen (second from the left) from the city of Bamenda who went to the village near Lake Nyos to help the people in their shock and grief after the tragedy that struck their families.

they were so struck that they even paid for my ticket to go back the next day."

"On the second day," Cletus added, "I was surprised to note that the atmosphere was already very different. As soon as the survivors saw us arrive they gathered around, clapping their hands and calling us by name. It was very clear that they were happy to see us again. We wanted to assure them that their suffering was also ours and that this truly made us brothers and sisters to them. This was the case, for example, with one boy who had written a single, unforgettable sentence in his school note book: "On August 21, I lost ten of my brothers and sisters and I was left alone with only my mother."

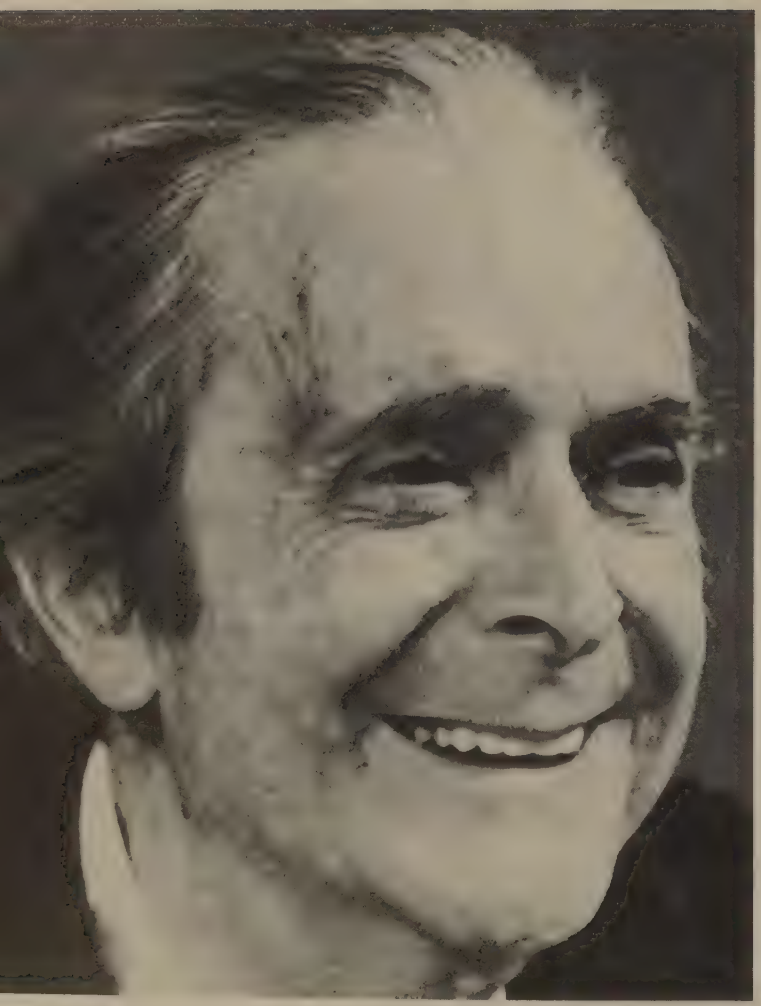
"He had survived because that night he had gone to sleep in a nearby town. The next morning, returning home he fell across the first corpses and realized that a disaster had befallen his village. He started to run and called out for his mother. He found her crumpled form, covered with ants, lying against the door of his house. She was still alive.

"Our experience at Wum," Cletus concluded, "clearly showed us that God is challenging us young people to give up ourselves without counting the cost."

Charles, Sophie and Cletus have since transmitted this challenge to others who, at the beginning of September, started travelling in small groups to the various camps located in the Nyos area in order to broaden this initiative of hope.

□

1) See inside back cover.



Like a sun between clouds

SOLITUDE:

April 22, 1960—Weariness increases, irritations multiply, solitude grows more intense, like a sun between clouds and the twigs of naked trees. Now what is this but an invitation to recollect oneself more seriously and continually in the presence of God, to give the rest of one's life some value in a more serious service, with fewer distractions? What is this but a fatherly intervention on the part of Christ the Teacher persuading us to translate into action the teachings given us in regard to the fleeting nature of human affections? Everything collapses, only God remains. To love is to serve, not to be served, it is giving not receiving. the recompense is given by God: the fruit is his love.

FREEDOM:

August 24—Love is the sap which makes the flower grow. In man, it feeds liberty; in love life reveals itself as a development into liberty: a process of liberation. we are so attached to our fetters that as they gradually fall away it seems to us a loss: and instead it is a gain. Glimpsing certain phases of this process my son S. said to me this morning: "Daddy, it rather looks as though your friends are casting you off...."

To banish such a thought from his mind and from mine, I replied, "It is a result of old age. When one is old, one is cast off: pensioned off, put on one side...."

But then, when I came to think it over more carefully, old age appeared to me as a stage of definitive liberation, with the final goal ever in view, the meeting between God and myself: God alone, I alone. As at the supreme judgment.

Igino Giordani, or Foco as we called him, is a figure well known to many of our readers. The first married focolarino,[1] statesman, theologian, and journalist, **Living City** *has often published his writings. At this time we would like to offer to our readers several reflections on particular themes selected from his diary.[2]*

ILLNESS:

April 23—Illness, lived in love, produces a spiritual health, which communicated to the mystical body, repays with treasures of holiness, gifts of soups and medicines. In the sick, Christ repays as only he knows how, giving the Infinite for a glass of water.

August 24—For more than a month I have been ill, with an indisposition that causes me some little discomfort and, above all, keeps me housebound. I had not had any experience of illness, since my wound at the front. And therefore I have suffered from solitude and complained of it, experiencing the delusory character of my virtues, of my repeated resolution never to complain. With my children to help me, I have realized what isolation and darkness I have tumbled into and at first I decided to react against it and regain a place among men. Then Saint Teresa came to show me that this desolation is a miniature dark night, composed of regrets for the world: honors, fame, vanity.... And she made me see that it is a leap forward, towards union with God. *Solus cum sola.* He would have my soul for himself. And these detachments, rather than losses, are gains of further sectors of the freedom of the sons of God.

November 1—One of the best of days: physical indisposition has kept me at home, and at home I meditated on Mary and my soul was filled with her: therefore with poetry, beauty, purity. It was virginized.

And it is the feast of the Saints: they then reach their culmination and are summed up in Mary, "Mother of the Saints."

Being with her, I was in the Cenacle, which was thronged with them.

HUMILITY:

1964—You contemplate yourself and you no longer see anything. You see your brother and you contemplate God.

"God has enclosed all in unbelief, in order to show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32).

Nonetheless, humility to the point of making yourself nothing is not to be understood as abjection or degradation. It is the freedom of the sons of God. The humble soul is filled with the Holy Spirit; the base soul is filled with self-love, reduced to refuse. It does not serve for God's sake; it serves for its own sake. It does not love and therefore does not give itself to others; it loves itself and therefore serves to obtain, to reduce to nothing; it serves itself.

Humility is the most sublime virtue: indeed the foundation of dignity. A Virgin Mary who would behave in a servile fashion, ready to seek praise, that is falsehood, is inconceivable. and on the other hand, cowardice is the basest of passions, paying to its own self a worship conducted with materials taken from the dustbin.

And therefore: humility, like Mary, without flattery or weakness is far removed from abjection.

Igino Giordani

1) See inside back cover; 2) Igino Giordani, "Diary of Fire," published by New City Press, New York, 1982.

At one time or another we have all wished we could stop time. Speaking to a group of children years ago Chiara Lubich shared with them a solution she found: "to live the present moment well, with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, letting go of everything that is not the will of God thereby making of each action a beautifully wrapped package presentable to God."

"Today" is a column in which we share experiences reflecting the efforts of people to live this experience of making the most of the moments which fill the day. They just might help us all to live days that will remain forever.

Not long ago I was in the process of looking for a job change. The place where I was working had a four-day work week, so I normally went job hunting on my day off.

On one of the weekends, I discovered my car needed new brakes. The left rear wheel was the worst of all four, so my dad and I worked on them. When we were finished, though, we made the mistake of not tightening the lug nuts on the left rear wheel. Apparently we both thought the other had.

Two days later at around 1:30 in the morning, my wife awakened me. She was having a minor asthma attack, and since she is expecting a baby, she could not take the usual medicines. She needed treatment at the local hospital. After the treatment, she felt much better, and it was on our way home that our adventure began.

We were about two miles from home when I noticed that something was wrong with the car. Suddenly I saw a wheel roll from the left side of the car followed by a loud bang.

Fortunately the car ended up in the middle of the road on the median strip, away from oncoming traffic.

By this time it was about 4:30 a.m. The morning was cold with a steady drizzling rain. I got out of the car and realized my first problem was how to secure the spare tire without any lug nuts. I solved the problem by removing one lug nut from each of the remaining three wheels. While I was lifting the car up on the jack, I encountered the second problem: the jack jammed. By then I was soaked and my hands were numb with cold. In a way I felt abandoned with no help in sight ... and with no tools. I thought then of how Jesus must have felt when he was on the cross. I felt consoled that he loved us so much to go through that so that even I, standing there in front of the jammed jack, wouldn't feel truly alone. It helped me.

I was suprised that I did not get angry or frustrated. I decided instead to trust in God and keep going. I was able to get the car off the jack safely by knocking the jack off. Soon we were on the road again.

We took the car to be repaired and that meant I couldn't go job hunting as I had planned. Again I just tried to trust in God.

The next day I went back to work. I was supposed to have called the Personnel Office to check results on my test scores for a position. When I called in I was told that the Personnel Office had been trying to locate me. Not only did they say the results were good, but they even had a job offer for me. In fact, I was to start in a week! God is never outdone in generosity.

A.L.

On Friday evening, everyone was leaving the office when I found out that one of my colleagues was considering an abortion. This discovery resulted from several offhand comments and conversations during the previous days.

As soon as I could collect my thoughts, I bolted out of the office without my coat to catch her before she was out of sight. When I found her at the door of the building, I simply asked if it was true. She explained that it was, in fact the abortion was scheduled for the following afternoon.

I asked her if she would like to grab something to eat and talk for a while. As we walked one block to a cafe', I prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

She belonged to a pool of secretaries that processed my analyses along with the work of others. Since we had worked together on several projects there was already an open, trusting rapport. At first, I simply asked to know more about her predicament. The child's father was insisting on the abortion. Finances were limited and my colleague feared losing her job as a result of this pregnancy. Her parents were not in a position to help out and they seemed to be encouraging an abortion as well. Finally, she was concerned about being ostracized by her colleagues. She had no maternity clothes for work.

I assured her that I was willing to do everything possible to enable her to have this child. Since money appeared to be a factor, I promised to find a solution, including contacting a number of acquaintances for assistance. I thought that her fear of being fired was baseless, but nevertheless, I told her that the company would have to lose me if they tried to fire her. If they tried, I would take the issue to court. I told her that adoption could even be arranged if she wished. I guaranteed the availability of maternity outfits appropriate for an elegant office environment. But most of all, I tried to let her feel supported in this difficult, stressful situation.

When we parted after an hour, she thanked me saying that I was only the second person, besides one friend, who had encouraged her to have the child. It was evident that she actually wanted to bring this pregnancy to term.

Later that evening, I prayed with some friends that she would have the strength to make the right decision. In fact, I never stopped praying throughout the weekend. Upon returning to work on Monday, she told me that she did not have the abortion, but she was still undecided. It was a remarkable, surprising coincidence that on that same day another colleague announced that she was expecting a child. We both commented that this seemed like a providential development facilitating the acceptance in the office of her pregnancy.

During the following days, I did everything possible so that she would not feel alone in facing this difficult situation. My sister agreed to give several beautiful maternity outfits since she had only recently given birth herself. Little by little, my colleague firmed up her decision to bring the pregnancy to term. But it was a painful, agonized decision because the father was still vehemently insisting on the abortion.

Seven months later, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. She thanked me repeatedly for helping her to make this decision. And the father was delighted with his new son.

N.W.

WORD OF LIFE

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

(2 Corinthians 5:12)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

This word of life concludes a discourse in which Saint Paul tried to explain to the Christians of Corinth what the underlying force was that was urging him on his apostolic activities: his immense love for Jesus. At the same time he gave a strong warning to certain members of the community who had demonstrated by their behavior not to have comprehended the message of Jesus in all its impact; they had not understood that Jesus came to bring about a radical change in our lives.

Saint Paul wanted to remind them that Jesus died so that we too would die with him to the "old world" and rose so that we too would rise with him to the "new world." Jesus gave his life in order to make of all people children of God, participants in his own divine life, in a word, to make of us a new creation.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

Saint Paul says if a person is in Christ, meaning if Christ lives in the individual, he or she is another person, totally new: new in his or her way of thinking, loving, behaving.

These then are the people who have left behind everything that belonged to the old world and set themselves to building the new world with the mind and heart of Jesus.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

Hence, if we have truly understood the new message of the gospel—St. Paul observes—we can no longer judge according to the categories which characterize the mentality of the world. We can no longer classify people on the basis of privileges of race, class or culture. We can no longer resign ourselves to accepting society divided as it is into many factions or in opposing blocks.

Indeed, we can no longer deal with people according to the criteria of likeableness, opportunism or self-interest. Jesus has not loved us because of any particular merit or ability. His is freely given love and it is exactly with this freely given love that he has made us new. Jesus would like us to do the same: i.e., to have a new love that reaches out to love first, a love which is capable of transforming the world.

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

" ... to shower on others the freely given love that He showered on us ..."

Photo: Mario Ponta

How then can we live this word of life? It reminds us of the new and marvelous reality into which we were initiated the day of our baptism. We can, therefore, put it into practice by letting Jesus live in us.

His is a very rich life and we'd like to underscore in it the universality and freely given nature of his love.

We should recognize in our own lives the ever-present danger of stopping before appearances and forgetting that the real greatness and dignity of every person lies in being a child of God and brother or sister in Christ.

We need to be aware of the tendency creeping in continually in us to look for something for ourselves rather than trying to be the first to love, rather than putting ourselves at the service of others. Jesus instead asks us to shower on others the freely given love that he showered on us.

If we do this we will gradually see disappear many divisions that make our families, community, our society suffer.

Even in the mystical Body of Christ, the Church, we have distanced ourselves from one another. Do we, too, want to give our contribution towards the realization of full communion among the various Christian denominations? We can do so now by living this passage of the second letter to the Corinthians in union with all Christians. This, in fact, is the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Together we can be instruments for the building of the new world Jesus began with his resurrection.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

AT THE OLD FIREHOUSE

The Old Firehouse is a shelter for homeless men. Sometimes I serve as a host there at night.

One night Slim came in. He had little clothing or belongings, yet somehow he showed more vitality and joy in his eyes than I was accustomed to seeing. During the simple meal which we served him and the others he talked freely and earnestly about God and the Bible. He seemed particularly well-informed. He also seemed to be deeply hurt and lonely. He dropped clues that he had left a very fragile and disturbed home life for the streets. Without a high school diploma he found getting and holding a job very difficult. He became a regular guest at the shelter.

One night a few weeks later, I noticed that the spark was gone. He was silent and withdrawn. His eyes were red and there were some signs of possible chemical use. He went almost immediately to bed.

I have come to understand that my love for my neighbor must be something more than sentiment, that it must, in fact, be expressed concretely and practically. What could I do for Slim?

The next morning I sat down with him to talk about his education. What about getting a GED certificate and taking some courses? With a little patient encouragement he soon entered a specialized program and he often brought his study materials to the shelter. I had meanwhile interested also some of my fellow hosts who shared with Slim their time, help and support.

He passed the exam for GED and almost immediately got a job. He then began to talk of college. After a couple of weeks he rented a small apartment. Then he came a few nights a week to help prepare the meal for the guests. He had become a host. He praised the spirit of unity and support which he had experienced. One evening he brought his girlfriend and introduced her to me and to the other hosts so that she would know "his family." I have the sense that he has made a discovery.

J.O.

MOVING THREE FAMILIES

My husband and I were just recently in the process of selling our house and buying another one. When we started we made a pact to keep love as the first priority in our dealings: to be love for our realtor and for those buying our house. As the date approached that had been set to sign the papers and move we realized that plans were underway involving three families: our sellers would move out, we would move in, and our buyers would move in. Each move depended on the previous one. The people buying our house wanted to move in on the first of the month to avoid having to pay a full month's rent where they were, so the date hinged on this. As the date neared to within days, our realtor called and told us the people moving out of the house we were buying were now balking at the moving date because the deal on the house that they were going to rent, fell through and they did not have a place ready to move into. Apparently the woman was quite upset because all the pressure was on them. Our realtor told us that she was going to inform them that they would just have to find a place to stay for the one day.

After hearing this my husband and I tried to see what we could do. The word of life we were trying to live was "To love God with all our heart, with all our thoughts, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice" (Mk 12:33) and we knew we wanted to find a solution that was love for everyone. By right we could insist on moving in on the set date, but by putting love first

"He seemed to have made a discovery at the Old Firehouse, a shelter for homeless men."

it was obvious we could not. What was the way, though?

We knew that we had to be the first to love. With this thought another idea came. We could move out of our house on the set date but instead of moving into the new house we could put our things in storage and live at my parents house for a week or so until the other family found a place. It meant facing two moves instead of one along with all the confusion that would come with it. But it was what we wanted to do. When we told our realtor she was reluctant to let us do it but she said she would inform the other family.

The next day I went with her to the house for the inspection. We met with the lady, and by this time our realtor had done some research on her own in response to our decision. She had spoken with the realtor of the people moving into our house and by checking with their rental company they found they would not have to pay a full month's rent if they stayed an extra week; it could be pro-rated. They agreed to postpone their move. The hundredfold!

The lady who had been putting off moving out told us how she now felt more peaceful than she had the day before. She even talked about her faith and how everything happens for the best. It turned out that they did have a house to rent, only it was not the one she had liked so much. They decided, however, to live there temporarily until they built one. We sat together in the den, talking cordially about the house and the neighbors and I played with her little girl as if we were old friends. We made arrangements for a new move-in date that was agreeable to everyone.

The inspector had been walking around from room to room going about his business. As our realtor and I stopped outside the house before leaving we met the inspector who also was leaving. He came towards us to say, "It is very unusual to see a buyer and a seller sitting down together talking so agreeably. Usually relations are unfriendly, to say the least. On my last job, the realtor made me the mediator!"

When he left, our realtor turned to me and said, "Pray for one thing: that my husband and I can be like you." With that I was able to share the word of life with her.

Our friendship and friendly relations with the families involved has continued long past the move: something I would not have envisioned.!

J .Z.

WINNING TRUST ON THE JOB

Question: It seems to be more difficult to bear witness to a Christian way of life on the job. By being ready and willing to help others we have seen that it is possible to form new, and genuine relationships. It happens though, that when people ask why we act as we do and realize that there is a Christian motivation at the basis of our lives, a wall often is erected. What can we do to overcome suspicion and build a greater unity on the job?

Youth from Germany

Answer: When I read your question I couldn't help but think of my own experience as a young worker trying to bear witness to my faith.

Today, the situation of young people in the work place is quite different but I think by trying to bear witness to a Christian life style you encounter substantially the same difficulties. Let me attempt to share something of my own experience with you.

The testimony that a Christian bears in his or her place of work should be one that is given primarily through the presence of the person. I do not mean just a spiritual presence, but a human, personal and social presence. This implies a participation in the many problems that exist in the working world, it means ensuring our own personal professional competency, having a sense of responsibility for the work as a whole and being willing to get involved in resolving employee problems.

Your fellow workers should feel that you are one of them, that you are capable, diligent, ready to help.

The gospel law of love forms in us a new mentality, it teaches us to "make ourselves one" with others, truly taking upon ourselves the problems, sufferings, joys and inconsistencies of our companions.

The testimony that we bear cannot remain theoretical especially when we are called as lay people to sanctify ourselves and sanctify others within the sphere of everyday realities, in the family, in the fields of culture, the arts, finance, in the working world and so on.

There are other members among the people of God (priests and religious) whose task it is to bear another form of witness. Lay Christians have the task of imitating Jesus, or better, of re-living him in the world. During Jesus' time people said of him, "Is not this the carpenter?"[1] This is how they saw him.

I would add that we should not expect results from our presence. What counts is to love, to approach others in a readiness to love. Christian love gives without expecting anything in return. What matters is that we do our part. We do not know if our love will be returned, or rather we do know that it will be returned but perhaps from another direction.

Don't be surprised if you encounter suspicion when people learn that you are Christian. That will happen because "a disciple is not greater than his master." People were suspicious of Jesus, too. You will more than likely encounter suspicion because it is so rare to find people who are ready to give and who do not have ulterior motives, not even that of trying to convert others. Your fellow workers will want to see if your readiness is real.

It takes perseverance; keep your channels of communication open and carry the relationships forward. This will give you a chance to prove that your love is authentic, and if by chance it isn't it will become so and, in time, it is bound to touch others' hearts. Of this you can be sure.

Giorgio Martelli

1) Mark 6:3.

Images FOR words

"Each moment comes with a command to be fulfilled and passes into eternity with what we have done with it."

St. Francis de Sales

Photo: Mario Ponta

One day when I was in school, I forgot one of my books for a class whose teacher is very strict. I had never forgotten a book before in her class, and never had any problem with her before. For the first time, she went around to everyone in the class checking to see if everyone had their book. When she got to me, I expected her to get mad, but I didn't expect her to scream at me. She told me I would have detention for three days, and I would have to come to her after school because she would have enough work for me to do so that "my hands would fall off." I didn't want to pay attention in her class after she treated me that way. It was very hard to love her but I put my own feelings aside and tried to see Jesus in her and love her that way. When I went to her after school, I noticed a change in her and she apologized for the way she had talked to me, and took away all of my detentions. After this experience, I found it easier to love her.

S. M.
Age 15

My sister and mom were planning to go jogging in the morning. They were planning to take me also. I didn't want to go because I have to wake up early every day and I don't get alot of sleep. But I told myself, "Do it for Jesus." So I went jogging with them.

N. C.
Age 14

oung and the gospel

)ne Sunday my family went on picnic and I brought my kite long to show the other boys hat would be there. It was a eautiful kite and I liked it ery much.

I had brought the kite along eally hoping to fly it but it seemed that there wouldn't be enough time to do that and I was getting a little upset.

Then we finally got to fly it out we had some trouble with the wind. The kite was swaying and I was a little afraid it might fall into the trees. My little brother came by and I offered to let him fly the kite with my supervision.

While he was holding it the kite started to sway in the wind very fast and go down. One of the other boys was trying to help me keep it up and said, "Reel it in!" but my brother wouldn't let go. The kite took a nose dive into a tree. All fifty feet of it got entangled. I kept telling myself, "I'm not going to get upset because I shouldn't be overattached to it ... even it stays up in that tree for the rest of my life!" I told myself that my brother was more important than the kite so I let the string go.

Then I thought to myself, "Maybe it will come down ...." Nobody else thought that it would but all of a sudden it just slid down out of the tree onto the roof of a building and to the ground! All in one piece! That was my hundredfold.

J.S.
age 14

I was in the cafeteria and I was going to get some pie. I got the last piece. I then saw a little girl behind me who was crying because she wanted that piece and there wasn't any more. Her mom was having trouble trying to explain that there wasn't anything she could do. So, to love Jesus I gave her the piece. She stopped crying and her mother felt better.

V. C.
Age 12

(Continued from page 10)
maintain or restore peace. We renew our encouragement to the United Nations Organization, that it may respond fully to the breadth and height of its universal mission of peace.

In answer to the appeal I made from Lyons in France, on the day which we Catholics celebrate as the feast of Saint Francis, we hope that arms have fallen silent, that attacks have ceased. This would be a first significant result of the spiritual efficacy of prayer. In fact, this appeal has been shared by many hearts and lips everywhere in the world, especially where people suffer from war and its consequences.

It is vital to choose peace and the means to obtain it. Peace, so frail in health, demands constant and intensive care. Along this path, we shall advance with sure and redoubled steps, for there is no doubt that people have and never had so many means for building true peace as today. Humanity has entered an era of increased solidarity and hunger for social justice. This is our chance. It is also our task, which prayer helps us to face.

Praying and witnessing

What we have done today at Assisi, praying and witnessing to our commitment to peace, we must continue to do every day of our life. For what we have done today is vital for the world. If the world is going to continue, and men and women are to survive in it, the world cannot do without prayer.

This is the permanent lesson of Assisi: it is the lesson of Saint Francis who embodied an attractive ideal for us; it is the lesson of Saint Clare, his first follower. It is an ideal composed of meekness, humility, a deep sense of God and a commitment to serve all. Saint Francis was a *man of peace.* We recall that he abandoned the military career he had followed for a while in his youth, and discovered the value of poverty, the value of a simple and austere life, in imitation of Jesus Christ whom he intended to serve. Saint Clare was the *woman* par excellence, *of prayer.* Her union with God in prayer sustained Francis and his followers, as it sustains us today. Francis and Clare are examples of peace: with God, with oneself, with all men and women in this world. May this holy man and this holy woman inspire all people today to have the same strength of character and love of God and neighbor to continue on the path we must walk together.

Moved by the example of Saints Francis and Clare, true disciples of Christ, and newly convinced by the experience of this day we have lived through together, we commit ourselves to re-examine our consciences, to hear its voice more faithfully, to purify our spirits from prejudice, anger, enmity, jealousy and envy. We will seek to be peacemakers in thought and deed, with mind and heart fixed on the unity of the human family. And we call on all our brothers and sisters who hear us to do the same.

Put into action the strategies of peace with courage and vision

We do this with a sense of our own human limitations and with an awareness of the fact that by ourselves alone we will fail. We therefore reaffirm and acknowledge that our future life and peace depend always on God's gift to us.

In that spirit, we invite the leaders of the world to know that we humbly implore God for peace. But we also ask them to recognize their responsibilities and recommit themselves to the task of peace, to put into action the strategies of peace with courage and vision.

Let me now turn to each of you, representatives of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and World Religions, who have come to Assisi for this day of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

I thank you again for having accepted my invitation to come here for this act of witness before the world.

I also extend my thanks to all those who have made possible our presence here, particularly our brothers and sisters in Assisi.

And above all I thank God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, for this day of grace for the world, for each of you, and for myself. I do this in the words attributed to Saint Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument
of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me
sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness,
joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. □

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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